

Committee on Government Reform
Tom Davis, Chairman



MEDIA ADVISORY

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Davis, Van Hollen Announce Field Hearing on Gang Activity in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties

What: Government Reform Committee Field Hearing:
"MS-13 and Counting: Gang Activity in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties"

When: Wednesday, September 6, 2006, 12:30 p.m.

Where: Takoma Park City Council Chambers, 7500 Maple Ave., Takoma Park, MD

The purpose of this hearing is to examine the relationship between law enforcement and public and private organizations in combating Mara Salvatrucha ("MS-13") and other gangs in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties.

The Government Reform Committee previously held a hearing in the City of Fairfax focused on the regional gang problem as well.

MS-13 activity is prevalent in the Washington, D.C. region and is particularly high in suburban Maryland. Generally, MS-13 members operate in smaller, tighter groups called "cliques," committing brutal murders, burglaries, car-jackings, robberies, extortion, rapes, robberies, and machete attacks. MS-13 is not dissimilar to larger-scale criminal organizations. In fact, FBI and other law enforcement organizations—both in Maryland and nation-wide—are beginning to approach combating MS-13 as a criminal enterprise with a distinct leadership and command structure.

While certainly high profile, MS-13 is not the only gang operating in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. The Counties report gang activity by other Latino gangs such

as MS-13's rival, 18th Street, as well as by the Vatos Locos. However, at the June 1, 2006 Gang Summit organized by the Maryland Governor's office, it was announced that, in the past year, MS-13 activity had declined and the number of Crips and Bloods gangs as well as mixed-race gangs had increased. While a decrease in MS-13 gang activity has been noted by law enforcement, the concern is that this activity is simply becoming more subversive and more difficult to track, highlighting the continued need for the best resources for intelligence gathering and processing.

Maryland law enforcement agencies have seen an increase in gang activity in the past year, particularly in areas such as Langley Park, Silver Spring, and Takoma Park. At the same time, law enforcement has seen gang activity spread out throughout the Counties, while strengthening in the densely populated areas. Similarly, federal agencies, including U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), have noted an increase in gang violence in Montgomery County by gang members residing in Northern Virginia. Some attribute this increase in gang activity in Maryland to the effectiveness of the Northern Virginia Regional Gang Task Force.

The Committee has invited the following witnesses:

PANEL 1

The Honorable Jack B. Johnson, County Executive, Prince George's County

The Honorable George Leventhal, Chairman, Montgomery County Council

Assistant Chief John King, Montgomery County Police Department

Chief Melvin C. High, Prince George's County Police Department

PANEL 2

Carolyn Colvin, Director, Department of Health and Human Services
Montgomery County

Warden Robert L. Green, Montgomery County Correctional Facility

Mike Butler, Gang Prevention Coordinator, Prince George's County

Luis Cardona, Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator, Montgomery County

Daniel Arretche, Director of Development, Crossroads Youth Opportunity Center

Richard Brown, Small Business Owner

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